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SUBJECT: RENAISSANCE OF JEWISH LIFE CONTINUES IN BERLIN

¶1. Summary: Two new synagogues opened in Berlin, marking the revitalization of Jewish life in the former center of the Nazi Third Reich. The Lubavitch (Hassidic) Jewish Educational Center was inaugurated on September 2, two days after the opening of the newly renovated and historic Rykestrasse Synagogue. The openings of both synagogues were attended by numerous dignitaries, including the former chief rabbi of Israel and Holocaust survivors. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Ambassador Timken attended the dedication of the Jewish Educational Center, which itself was the object of a failed fire-bombing attempt earlier this year. Some observers stated that the unveiling of these synagogues demonstrates the resilience of the Jewish community in Germany, which looks to the construction of these synagogues as proof of the failure of Adolf Hitler's "final solution." End summary.

¶2. Rabbi Yehuda Teichtal, the driving force behind the construction of the Jewish Educational Center, noted that the educational center is the first in Germany to be built exclusively with private funding. He stressed that the center will strengthen the Jewish community in Berlin. Foreign Minister Steinmeier began his speech by welcoming the revitalized Jewish community in Berlin, stating that "whoever builds a house, stays." He underlined that Germany hopes that Judaism will resume its rightful role as a key element of German society, despite the ongoing problem of anti-Semitism.

¶3. The Rykestrasse Synagogue is Germany's largest Jewish temple. It first opened in 1904, serving the poorest of Berlin's Jewish residents. It was destroyed by fire, and its Torah was desecrated, on Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) in 1938. The building was taken over by the German Army during the Second World War and used as a textile factory, then was returned to the Jewish community at the end of the war. Religious services have been held in the synagogue ever since, but only now has it been restored to its original state. The highlight of the Rykestrasse Synagogue's reopening was a speech by Rabbi Ernst Stein, who was rabbi at this synagogue before and during the Holocaust. Rabbi Stein expressed joy that the synagogue was rebuilt "in the land where Jews were murdered, humiliated, debased, and slandered."

¶4. Comment: The openings of these synagogues, timed to occur just before Rosh Hashanah, come at a time when Germany is increasingly multicultural, but still afflicted by anti-Semitism. Right-extremism remains a serious problem in Germany, as the September 7 stabbing of a rabbi in Frankfurt and much-publicized incidents in Halberstadt and Muegeln demonstrate. Nonetheless, the Jewish community appears firm in its resolve to reenergize Jewish life in Germany. End comment.

TIMKEN JR